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THE UKRAINIAN *STAT'T'A* 'ARTICLE' BETWEEN AN ADAPTATION AND RUSSIFICATION*

Abstract

Out of the two forms of genitive plural of the Ukrainian noun *stat't'a* 'article', namely *stattej* and *statej*, the former has been assumed to be purely Ukrainian, whereas the latter a Russified one. The paper attempts to demonstrate that the relationship is not necessarily as simple, moreover, that such an interpretation does not altogether answer the question of why only the form of genitive plural, and why of this very word, would have become the object of a stronger Russification.

1.

It is beyond doubt that the Ukrainian word *stat't'a* 'article' comes from the Russian word *stat'ja*. Also the phonetic adaptation of the Russian *Vt'jV* > Ukrainian *Vt't'V* is fully regular. The form of the nominative singular *stat't'a* adapted phonetically in this way should create genitive in the form of *stattej*, and such a form is indeed attested. However, side by side with it there appears (and in the recent years it has even seemed to be advocated) a form with a short *-t-*, i.e. *statej*, which phonetically fully overlaps (having ignored the palatalisation) with the Russian genitive plural *stat'ej*.¹ In her study focused mainly on this word, Zinkiewicz-Tomanek (2008: 259) attributes the development of the ungeminated form *statej* to the external influence, which in our case may in concrete terms

* At this point I would like to thank warmly A. Fałowski (Cracow) and R. Woodhouse (Brisbane) for their discussion and additional examples, out of which only some have been included here.

¹ A somewhat strange and a more difficult one to explain is the fact that we have a similar relation in the Ukrainian nominative singular *bad'd'a*, genitive plural *badej* 'wooden pail', which (as an Irano-Turkism in East Slavonic languages) is not necessarily a borrowing in Ukrainian through Russian transmission – cf. footnote 5).

mean only the Russification of the Ukrainian form (however, not necessarily an intended one – it might possibly, though the Author does not discuss this question, mean even not an entirely conscious imitation of the Russian model). In view of the common knowledge of the Russian language in Ukraine such an influence does not require any special justification.

And yet a certain circumstance seems to blur this clear picture: the Russification may manifest itself in various ways, but why should anyone particularly care about Russifying the form of the genitive plural of this one word? And since such an intention appears to be quite unreal, there is a need for some other explanation of the existence of two forms of the genitive plural (*stattej*, *statej*) instead of only one (in the history of Ukrainian there have also appeared the forms of the genitive *stat't'jiv* and *stat't'iv*, but they seem to be of no consequence for us here).

2.

Let us first have a look at the processes which can be encountered here. The fact that the Russian group *Vt'jV* is regularly rendered in Ukrainian by *Vt't'V* (Zinkiewicz-Tomanek 2008: 257), perfectly explains the creation of the Ukrainian *stat't'a* < Russian *stat'ja*. However, in the Russian form of the genitive plural *stat'ej* we do not deal with the group *Vt'jV* as in the nominative singular, but with *Vt'V*, and this group does not have any grounds for changing into the Ukrainian *Vt't'V*. Thus, in this situation we are allowed to assume the following phonetic adaptation:

	Nom. sg.	Gen. pl.
(1) Russian:	<i>Vt'ja</i>	<i>Vt'e</i>
	↓	↓
(2) Ukrainian:	<i>Vt't'a</i>	<i>Vte</i>

Further, one might expect that some time after its having been borrowed by Ukrainian, the Russian word would have established itself there sufficiently well to create its own form of the genitive plural which would already be formed out of its own Ukrainian nominative, and be fully independent of its earlier Russian original:

(3) Ukrainian:	<i>Vt't'a</i> → <i>Vtte</i>
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When translating the above into the concrete sounds of the word we obtain two evolutionary stages:

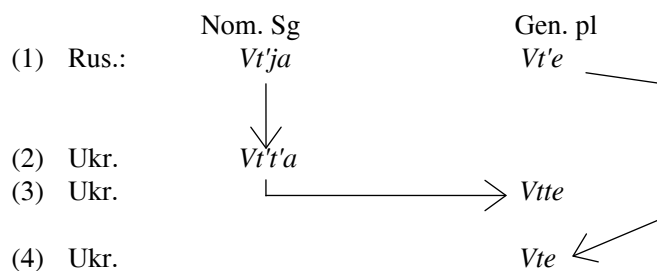
- Stage I: [a] Rus. *stat'ja* (1) → Ukr. *stat't'a* (2);
 [b] Rus. *stat'ej* (1) → Ukr. *statej* (2).

Stage II: [c] Ukr. *stat't'a* does not change, i.e. (2) = (3), however, the form *stattej* (3) develops and takes the position of the Ukrainian *statej* (2).

3.

We would thereby negate any Russifying action with regard to the reasons behind the origin of the ungeminated genitive plural. There is, however, a certain problem also in this solution: the form *stattej* (3) is attested in the descriptions of the Ukrainian language earlier than the form *statej* (2),² and thus the actual chronological relations are in fact reversed as compared to what would have resulted from our scheme. In consequence, we must admit that also our scheme is erroneous.

In order to reconcile the actual chronology of the records with the linguistic processes identified above it would be appropriate to present the whole issue as follows:



In other words:

Stage I: Rus. *stat'ja* (1) → Ukr. *stat't'a* (2);

Stage II: from Ukr. nom. sg *stat't'a* (2) a regular form of the genitive *stattej* (3) develops;

Stage III: under the Russian influence the form of the Ukrainian genitive *statej* (4) is secondarily created.

In this case the Russification process seems to leave no doubts. And yet the real character of this Russification is not at all obvious.

If at some stage Ukrainian normativists expressed a desire to consider the etymological factor³ in their decisions, they had to mark different reflexes of

² And thus e.g. the Ukrainian grammar by Zahrodski of 1939 gives the form *stattej*, and its 1949 edition – the form *statej* (Zinkiewicz-Tomanek 2008: 257).

³ And this is a common practice in normativism; is it not the knowledge of etymology that motivates normativists to establish the spelling in the Polish language once as <morze> ('sea'), and another time as <może> ('perhaps')? Is it not the same reason that makes the German normativists recommend the plural form of *Atlas* 'atlas' in the form of *Atlanten* and only unwillingly also allow for the form *Atlasse* in the most recent times (in fact, inconsistently, because e.g. only *Indizien*, and never **Indize*)?

two distinct initial situations in the Ukrainian forms of the Russian word. While the Russian *stat'ja* fulfils the conditions for the gemination of the consonant (hence the correct Ukrainian *stat't'a*), the Russian *stat'ej* with its group of *Vt'V*, and not **Vt'jV*, does not. Thus, from the point of view of the correctness of the reflexes, the form of the Ukrainian genitive plural should indeed sound *statej*.⁴ However, in terms of the correctness of the Ukrainian phonological system it should have the form *stattej*.⁵ Supporting the first or the second solution will follow from the views and hierarchy of criteria in a given normativist school. It appears that in the post-war times the faithfulness to phonetic-etymological equivalents (i.e. diachrony) was prevalent in Ukraine, whereas earlier the dominating criterion was the coherence of the contemporary phonological system (i.e. synchrony).

4.

To conclude, still one more consideration needs to be mentioned. Namely, the form *stattej* was not only mentioned in Ukrainian grammars before World War II, but it is also present in the contemporary writing outside the Ukrainian borders. The fact that the emigration circles do not comply with the changes of the language norm willingly can be observed also in other languages, especially there where such changes result from a destructive foreign influence.⁶ It transpires that this is exactly the situation we are dealing with here as well. In other words: the emigration circles reject the form *statej* not really because the criterion of the phonetic-etymological correctness is not acceptable to them, but rather because it leads to supporting the form which (in fact accidentally, because of the phonetic influence, and not an ideological one) overlaps precisely with the Russian form, and which can easily be perceived as a manifestation of the language Russification. Therefore, it seems to be a matter of dignity to support the Ukrainian form, which differs from the Russian one.

However the issue may be resolved in the future, it should be remembered that a preference for the form which is most different from the Russian one still reveals the same old dependence on Russian if only in a contrary sense.

⁴ Ultimately, the same conclusion can be reached on the assumption that the consonant before *-ej* cannot be for some reason geminated in Ukrainian. Such an idea would also concern words not borrowed via Russian, i.e. it would also include the word *bad'd'a* (see footnote 2), and thus it would be a more convenient explanation, however, it firstly requires to be demonstrated, therefore, it is safer at this moment not to insist on the combination of the forms *badej* and *statej* in one phonetic process.

⁵ The counterargument to the view that the *Vte* group in *statej* does not agree with the Ukrainian phonological system does not in fact have a major argumentative power, since the phenomenon is as regards borrowed words common in all languages. And thus, e.g. in the Polish word *kynologia* ('cynology') we also have the group *ky-* in the word initial position, although it never appears there in native words.

⁶ Cf. e.g., "Contrary to the East Armenian language [...], far from purism, the West Armenian language [...] attempts to substitute «internationalisms» with native neologisms" (Pisowicz 2001: 19).

References

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